

# Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada

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## Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada

THE DEPENDENCE OF THE NEW-BORN infant is clear: its need for special care, its lack of responsibility for its actions. Far less clear is when this period of dependence ends and mature competence begins. Many responses to this question have been offered in the past. From the age of seven, English common law would subject boys and girls to the same legal sanctions as adults. At the age of ten, boys were considered old enough to labour underground in coal mines by the terms of an 1873 Nova Scotia law. Fourteen was a typical school-leaving age early in the 20th century. Today, possibilities include the age of 18, when young people become eligible to vote, or 19, when they are legally qualified in many provinces to consume alcohol, or possibly the age of 22, when they commonly leave post-secondary institutions in search of a job.

Work was central to the lives of the great majority of children until well into the 20th century. Boys and girls contributed to the household to the extent that they were able to do so, labouring on the farm, in the fishery or in the woods, as domestic servants or as apprentices in crafts. As Canadian industries developed in the late 19th century, growing numbers of children worked for wages with unprecedented regularity and intensity in the new mines, mills and factories, often far removed from their parents. At the same time, other children roamed the streets of the major urban centres, earning their living by shoe-shining, newspaper sales and other street trades, by performing small services such as opening doors or offering entertainment, or by begging, petty theft or prostitution.<sup>1</sup> In the context of post-Enlightenment thought, these new and unsettling means of organizing labour helped to undermine the generally held opinion that early initiation to work was both natural and necessary among the labouring classes and prompted the rethinking of traditional attitudes towards children. In 1861 John A. Macdonald could celebrate the factory as a place of employment for children. No prime minister from the time of Wilfrid Laurier onward would be likely to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the mid-19th century, reformers sought to reconstruct Canadian childhood to remove the experience of work from children's lives and offer in its place a lengthy period of nurture through play and schooling. The prolonged dependence of the child was central to emerging views of childhood. Mature thought and independent behaviour were seen as precocious and were actively discouraged.

- 1 John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp: Italian Child Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London, and New York* (Montreal and Kingston, 1992). John Bullen discusses child workers in "Children of the Industrial Age: Children, Work and Welfare in Late Nineteenth-Century Ontario", Ph.D. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1989. But for John's tragic death, this fine study would now be in print.
- 2 John A. Macdonald, *Address of the Honourable John A. Macdonald to the Electors of the City of Kingston* (Kingston, 1861), p. 94. Macdonald found the opportunity for useful employment the factory provided during winter particularly attractive.

Robert McIntosh, "Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada", *Acadiensis*, XXVIII, 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 126-140.

Children were defined as weak and vulnerable. For their own protection, they needed to be segregated from adult society and spared adult responsibilities, such as earning a living. To draw a crude distinction between the traditional child and the “reconstructed” child, the one was competent and productive and the other was dependent. The traditional child participated in the adult world, indeed inhabited a world where no hard and fast distinctions were made between children’s activities and those of adults. The “reconstructed” child, in contrast, was segregated in special institutions developed for “children”. Most crucially, this redefinition extended to every child. All were to experience a prolonged — and common — childhood.<sup>3</sup>

Early efforts to recover children’s history depict how individuals and public institutions (records-creators) responded to children and the problems supposedly associated with them. They reflect the meagre available documents, telling us as much, if not more, about the institutions that dealt with children, and their organizers, as they do about the children themselves. When the last review article on childhood appeared in the pages of this journal, now nearly 15 years ago, Craig Heron examined a literature focused on “child-savers”, those individuals and organizations dedicated to improving the conditions of children’s lives.<sup>4</sup> These studies examined early orphanages in Canada,<sup>5</sup> exponents of child emigration such as Dr. Thomas Barnardo<sup>6</sup> and the Children’s Aid Society movement.<sup>7</sup> Education was also a major early focus of the literature on children.<sup>8</sup> Neil Sutherland’s *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus*, which focuses on the activity of reformers in building a national shared definition of childhood from the 1870s to the First World War, stands as the Canadian “classic” from this period.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, the literature on childhood has broadened, but studies of child welfare, education, health and juvenile delinquency remain the principal paths to the history of childhood.<sup>10</sup> Work,

3 See particularly R.L. Schnell, “Childhood as Ideology”, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 27 (February 1979), pp. 7-28 and Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum: From Child Rescue to the Welfare State in English Canada (1800-1950)* (New York, 1983).

4 Craig Heron, “Saving the Children”, *Acadiensis*, XIII, 1 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 168-75.

5 Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*; Rooke and Schnell, *Studies in Childhood History: A Canadian Perspective* (Calgary, 1982).

6 Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Montreal, 1980); Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Toronto, 1980).

7 Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In the Children’s Aid: J.J. Kelso and Child Welfare in Ontario* (Toronto, 1981).

8 For useful introductions to the extensive literature on education see Chad Gaffield, “Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education”, *Acadiensis*, XV, 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 169-90 and J. Donald Wilson, “The New Diversity in Canadian Educational History”, *Acadiensis*, XIX, 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 148-69. See also Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, 1988) and R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal, 1990).

9 Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto, 1976). For another overview of Canadian childhood, addressing a far earlier period, see Denise Lemieux, *Les petits innocents. L’enfance en Nouvelle-France* (Québec, 1985).

10 Neil Sutherland, Jean Barman and Linda Hale (compilers), *History of Canadian Childhood and Youth: A Bibliography* (Westport, Conn., 1992). See also Denise Lemieux, “Les Enfants Perdus et Retrouvés: La Recherche sur les Enfants au Québec”, *Recherches sociographiques*, XXXVI, 2 (1995), pp. 327-52.

children's major activity before the 20th century, continues to be largely neglected.<sup>11</sup>

The history of childhood has been reconstructed through studies of adults and their activities — and children's responses to these. Only rarely is the agency of children recognized in the historical literature: children tend to be portrayed as passive beings who are the objects of welfare and educational strategies. The history of childhood becomes the history of the efforts of others on children's behalf.

The original model for the "reconstructed" child emerged among relatively affluent urban residents. Their attempts to change the rural, immigrant and working-class experience of childhood to middle-class urban specifications helped to fuel the transformation of childhood. Reformers from a wide range of backgrounds, though, contributed to the shift. Acknowledging considerable overlap among his categories, Neil Sutherland identified three "clusters" of social reformers who provided the impetus for change: Christians with a "social passion", members of the urban middle class "who saw a reconstructed childhood as part of their effort to make the new environment a place of order and prosperity for themselves and their offspring", and careerists in new child-focused professions such as teaching.<sup>12</sup> By the turn of the century these reformers had, Sutherland argues, "draw[n] the plans for and rough[ed] in many of the dimensions of a transformed childhood".<sup>13</sup>

Early evangelical reformers sponsored juvenile emigration from the United Kingdom to Canada. As well, they founded temperance groups, such as the Band of Hope, which was among the earliest specialized societies for children. A range of church organizations followed. Sunday Schools were joined towards the end of the 19th century by groups such as the Boys' Brigades, the YWCA, the YMCA and, in the 20th century, Canadian Girls in Training.<sup>14</sup> Members of the growing urban middle class brought a more secular concern to reform, notably an interest in common schools. The Halifax Society for the Prevention of Cruelty was founded by a group of young businessmen in 1876 to provide assistance to neglected and homeless children. The Montreal Society for the Protection of Women and Children, organized in 1882 to address cruelty to children, street-trading and prostitution, was soon lobbying for more comprehensive child labour legislation and a juvenile court system. Associations concerned with children's expanding leisure time, such as the Cadet movement, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides, were organized at the turn of the

11 Child labour is widely documented in the published *Reports of Evidence* of the Royal Commission on Capital and Labour (Ottawa, 1889). G.S. Kealey edited a heavily abridged version of this testimony, *Canada Investigates Industrialism* (Toronto, 1973). Recent articles on child labour include John Bullen, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth Century Urban Ontario", *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), pp. 163-87; Robert McIntosh, "The Boys in the Nova Scotian Coal Mines, 1873-1923", *Acadiensis*, XVI, 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 35-50; Lorna F. Hurl, "Restricting Child Factory Labour in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario", *Labour/Le Travail*, 21 (Spring 1988), pp. 87-121.

12 Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society*, p. 236.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

14 Wendy Mitchinson, "The YWCA and Reform in the Nineteenth Century", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, 12, 24 (November 1979), pp. 368-84; Diana Pedersen, "'Keeping Our Good Girls Good': The YMCA and the 'Girl Problem', 1870-1930", *Canadian Women's Studies*, 7, 4 (Winter 1986), pp. 20-4; Margaret Prang, "'The Girl God Would Have Me Be': The Canadian Girls in Training, 1915-1939", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXVI, 2 (June 1985), pp. 154-84.

century. Women took a prominent role in middle-class reform. Local women's groups established orphanages — notably the Protestant Orphan Homes — beginning in the 1850s. Organizations such as the National Council of Women of Canada, which was founded in 1893, sponsored efforts to improve children's health through well-baby clinics, children's playgrounds, anti-smoking campaigns and the promotion of domestic science.<sup>15</sup> Women's Institutes had a strong interest in child welfare issues as well.<sup>16</sup> The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which was formed to fight alcohol consumption, enrolled children in special organizations on the basis of the "triple pledge" to forswear liquor, tobacco and bad language. Its goals came to include further regulation of children's leisure: scrutinizing their literature, demanding curfews and advocating stiffer children's protection legislation.<sup>17</sup> Members of the new professions — factory and mine inspectors, educators, juvenile court officials and social workers — lobbied for more powerful instruments to enforce existing legislation to protect children and to extend its scope by broadening the definition of eligible children.

Efforts to reconstruct childhood clashed with a key economic strategy of working-class families: supplementing household income with the wages of children.<sup>18</sup> Yet organized labour deserves a place on Sutherland's list. From its first meeting in 1883, the Trades and Labour Congress called for factory acts that would regulate child labour and improve access to public education through the free provision of books. In 1887 it called for the enforcement of provincial laws "compelling children of a certain age to attend school". By the 1890s its platform called for free and compulsory education and the abolition of child labour.<sup>19</sup>

Reformers, limited in their ability to re-create childhood through their own efforts, sought the assistance of the state. Before the middle of the 19th century, legislators had been reluctant to intervene and regulate the child's place within the nurturing family, a realm where the state normally had no role. Only when the family was unable to discharge its responsibilities and there were seriously neglected or criminal children was the state obliged to act. Its response was to treat children much like adults. For the poor, the first choice for the able-bodied was to bind them out. If this was not possible, children were placed in Poor Houses, or Houses of Industry, where they were mixed promiscuously with adults. Similarly, the criminal justice system made little special provision for the young until the 1850s, when the Canadas established separate trials for those under 16. Canada East and Canada West also had provincial reformatories by 1859. In subsequent decades, industrial schools for truants and minor delinquents were established and they became a convenient way to house large numbers of neglected children. One of the earliest, the Protestant Halifax

15 N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1993* (Ottawa, 1993).

16 Linda M. Ambrose, *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario* (Erin, Ont., 1996).

17 Sharon Anne Cook, *"Through Sunshine and Shadow": The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal and Kingston, 1995).

18 See Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto, 1993).

19 Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Annual Proceedings, 1883 et seq.*

Industrial School, operated from 1863.<sup>20</sup> Over the last decades of the 19th century, institutions were established for infants, orphans and neglected and delinquent children, reflecting the growing view that children needed special care.

The key innovation, however, did not concern select groups of poor or delinquent children. The free and common school, which was directed at all children, was central to efforts to reform and prolong childhood. The first steps towards compulsory education were tentative: only the youngest children were required to attend school, just for a few months per year. Ontario, which in 1871 was the first province to pass compulsory schooling legislation, required seven- to 12-year-olds to attend school at least four months a year. Prince Edward Island, in 1877, was the second to inaugurate province-wide compulsory education. Children between eight and 13 were to attend school for at least 12 weeks each term.<sup>21</sup> Over time, an ever greater proportion of children sat in classrooms for an ever greater portion of their lives. By the Second World War, provisions were in place in every province whereby children from six to 16 were expected to attend school regularly for up to ten months of the year. Even in Quebec, where resistance to compulsory schooling was tenacious, a compulsory education law passed in 1943.<sup>22</sup>

Efforts to restrict child labour followed as new legislation was introduced stipulating the minimum age of employment and/or maximum hours of employment for children below a specified age. Nova Scotia and British Columbia passed Mines Acts in 1873 and 1877, followed by Ontario and Quebec in 1890 and 1892. Factory Acts appeared in Ontario and Quebec in 1884 and 1885, and in Manitoba and Nova Scotia in 1900 and 1901. Ontario and Manitoba passed (retail) Shops Acts in 1888.<sup>23</sup> During the 1880s provincial governments passed Children's Protection Acts to restrict children from street performances, begging and peddling goods. This same legislation also regulated children's leisure by banning them from saloons, billiard rooms and dance-halls. It also often contained curfew clauses. Other prohibitions concerning smoking and drinking followed, and in the 20th century children have been barred from viewing certain categories of motion pictures.<sup>24</sup>

Children's Protection Acts were also employed to extend the state's role to include regulation of the home, allowing public officials the right to remove children from a household if there was parental mistreatment or neglect. Nova Scotia passed early Children's Protection Acts in 1880 and 1882, largely at the behest of the Halifax

20 Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, N.S., 1989), p. 126. On industrial schools, see Paul W. Bennett, "Taming the 'Bad Boys' of the 'Dangerous Class': Child Rescue and Restraint at the Victoria Industrial School, 1887-1935", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, XXI, 41 (May 1988), pp. 71-96; Charlotte Neff, "The Ontario Industrial Schools Act of 1874", *Canadian Journal of Family Law/ Revue canadienne de droit familial*, 12, 1 (1994), pp. 171-208.

21 Department of Labour, *The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Canada* (Ottawa, 1930), pp. 96-9.

22 See Dominique Marshall, *Aux origines sociales de l'Etat providence: Familles québécoises, obligation scolaire et allocations familiales, 1940-1955* (Montréal, 1998). This fine book discusses the origins and impact (within Québec) of the inauguration of compulsory schooling in the province in 1943 and of the federal family allowance programme in 1945.

23 Department of Labour, *Employment of Children*.

24 Moral reform had a particular impact on children. See Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto, 1991).



Society for the Prevention of Cruelty, which allowed magistrates to remove children from abusive homes. The 1893 Ontario Children's Protection Act gave legal status to Children's Aid Societies and permitted them to take children from cruel or neglectful parents. In a marked shift away from institutionalization, the legislation allowed them to be placed in a foster home. The Ontario model was adopted in other provinces, and continues to serve as the basis for child welfare activity in Canada. Quebec was the principal exception. Suspicion of state legislation and of any effort to move away from institutionalization within the Roman Catholic hierarchy led to a distinct response to child welfare in Quebec. The Church had operated welfare institutions in the province for centuries and institutionalization of dependent children remained government policy into the 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

The state defined children as dependent beings, requiring prolonged protection in segregated institutions. It then regularly extended the age of legal minority. The first provisions for compulsory school attendance in the 19th century applied to children under the age of 12 or 14. By the early 20th century, education was compulsory until the age of 14 or 16 in most provinces. When Parliament passed legislation in 1892 enabling the provinces to establish juvenile courts, provision was made for the separate trial for children to the age of 16. In 1921, the threshold was raised to 18. Responding to turn-of-the-century concerns over a perceived white slave trade, federal criminal law steadily redefined female sexual maturity. Sexual relations in a brothel with a girl under 12 were a felony in 1886. The age was raised to 14 in 1890. Likewise, the minimum age for legal participation in the wage labour force was progressively raised. In the coalfields of Nova Scotia, for instance, the minimum age for underground employment was set at ten in 1873 and raised to 12 in 1891. It was extended to 16 in 1923, to 17 in 1947 and to 18 in 1954. Legal status as a minor — childhood — included increasingly older young people. In key ways, legislation defines the contemporary child by age.

Efforts to remake childhood generated considerable resistance. Some members of the middle class condemned the legislation as an assault on parental responsibility and as an unwarranted extension of the state's authority. Employers resented limits on their access to labour. The Roman Catholic Church, especially in Québec, resisted the intrusion of secular authority into its realm. State action, despite its universal application, aimed primarily at the children of rural and immigrant families, seeking to make them conform to urban middle-class models. In his earlier review in *Acadiensis*, Craig Heron underlined the class dimension of the reconstruction of childhood and the unbalanced relationship between middle-class reformers and working-class children. Even as outspoken a "child-saver" as J.J. Kelso felt that working-class girls should be self-supporting at the age of 12, and boys at the age of 14.<sup>26</sup> While wide support emerged within the working class for efforts to transform childhood — it was not imposed unilaterally by one class or another — it is with respect to working-class, immigrant and farm children, whose labour was so often crucial to their families, that the success of reformers' efforts has to be measured.

Neil Sutherland has aptly described childhood's 19th-century reinvention:

25 See Pauline Gill, *Les enfants de Duplessis* (Montréal, 1991).

26 J.J. Kelso, *First Report of Work Under the Children's Protection Act* (Toronto, 1894), p. 27.

Prodded by the need to solve newly emerged, perceived, or discovered practical problems, Canadians gradually sorted out various groups of children who needed particular kinds of care. As they did so, they set more and more precise and increasingly high standards for various phases of a “proper” childhood and proposed remedies for those who did not meet them. It was a very *ad hoc* process with few precedents for anyone to follow.<sup>27</sup>

In the 20th century, efforts to reform childhood have continued. Income support measures have been introduced: Separation Allowances for soldiers’ wives and dependents during the First World War and Mothers’ Allowances for needy women with children beginning with Manitoba in 1916. The first Family Allowance cheques were mailed in 1945. Since that time, welfare payments (however miserly) and child tax credits have been introduced, and they contribute materially to the support of children. On another front, public medicine since the Second World War has aimed to guarantee adequate medical care to all Canadians. These programmes, like earlier 19th century efforts, have failed to produce universal minimum standards of education, play or family life. To give only the most striking example, reports regularly reveal the unconscionable number of Canadian children who live below the poverty line. Yet we should not understate the effectiveness of the efforts of childhood’s reformers. They have had their successes.

Hilary Thompson, ed., *Children’s Voices in Atlantic Literature and Culture: Essays on Childhood* (Guelph, Canadian Children’s Press, 1995) is a collection of papers presented at the 4th Thomas H. Raddall Symposium at Acadia University. It reflects regional themes and unique aspects of Atlantic Canadian childhoods. In his summary of the symposium, David Staines observes that in the harsh Atlantic environment, childhood seemed to be exceptionally brief. The articles in this collection employ a range of evidence — archival records, published works and individual recollection — but most draw from adult literary representation of children. Atlantic fiction reflects distinct regional aspects of childhood. The children in Norman Duncan’s stories, which are set in turn-of-the-century outports, could expect to start to work early in life. At the age of six or seven children were usefully employed splitting fish; within a few years boys could expect to go out with the boats. Formal schooling, such as it was, counted for little. Muriel Whitaker examines the tragic theme of the impact on children of absent fathers searching for distant work. David Creelman explores the theme of death and the child in regional fiction, linking ideas of absence and loss with the memory of shared Maritime community. Two of the articles in the collection are personal memoirs of childhood. Oral history has the clear merit of being a record created by the children themselves, albeit in these cases the record is filtered through decades of experience as adults. Isabelle Knockwood recounts aspects of her Mi’kmaq childhood — spent in part at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia — and historian Alan Wilson relates his memories of life as the son of a wholesale grocer in Halifax.

In three of the articles, based on archival records, children speak clearly through their words and actions. Sheila Andrew’s “The Gauthier Girls: Growing Up on

27 Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*, p. 20.



Miscou Island, 1841-1847", focuses on a community where fishing was the economic mainstay. Girls from the age of ten worked for wages salting, drying and splitting fish and on the fish company's farm. Despite their continuing responsibility for domestic labour — minding younger children, cooking, gardening, spinning and weaving coarse cloth — paid work gave girls a measure of independence. It also permitted the purchase of luxuries, such as clothing, ribbons and treats. Boys only received their opportunity to earn an income when they were old enough to join their fathers on the fishing boats. Sharon Myers examines the Boys' Industrial Home of East Saint John, which opened as a reformatory in 1893. Boys, many under the age of 12, were incarcerated in the Home for a wide variety of reasons, with indeterminate sentences of up to five years. Perhaps as many as half of residents were just poor, thought to be neglected by their parents or guardians. Some were boys whose family found them unmanageable. A minority were delinquents. The boys' general dissatisfaction with the institution was reflected in acts of petty sabotage. In 1929 this developed into threats of violence, incendiarism and a number of attempted escapes. Two inquiries (one by Charlotte Whitton) revealed filthy, over-crowded buildings, foul food and a lack of programmes. Myers shows particular sensitivity to children's agency, recognizing that children "were not simply passive recipients, but active, empowered participants in their own reinvention". In "Three Tales of Child Custody in Nova Scotia", Philip Girard explains that until the 20th century the welfare of children in custody disputes was of much less importance than the rights of parents. Paternal rights have increasingly given way to maternal rights. Today, in a shift he associates with the sentimentalization of childhood, the "best interest of the child" doctrine is used to determine child custody.

C.M. Blackstock's *All the Journey Through* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997) is an engaging account of three inter-related 19th-century families, the Gibbs, Blackstocks and Gooderhams. It is also an exploration of how the past is remembered. It begins with a short section based on personal recollection and family lore. The remainder of the book unfolds chronologically and is based on written records. Some effort is made — though perhaps not developed as far as it might have been — to compare and contrast the remembered past with the documented past. The book spans the period from the 1780s — when the merchant Monkhouse Tate makes a brief visit to Canada — to the First World War. The first part of the book describes the author's own childhood, the individuals who inhabited it and the accounts of the past they related to her. Recollection depends in part on triggers: artefacts such as oval silhouettes, or houses inhabited in the past or once familiar landscapes. The book's most important documentary source is a stack of letters, dating from 1817 to 1919, marked "destroy", which had been in the possession of an elderly woman, the author's great-aunt Millie. The information in these letters is ably supplemented by archival research in the National Archives of Canada, the Archives of Ontario, the Archives nationales du Québec at Montreal and in various British repositories. The author's Blackstock ancestors receive far greater attention than the much wealthier Gooderhams, who left an inferior written record.

This is a book of memorable figures. Among them are Thomas Gibbs and his wife Caroline — Monkhouse's daughter — who emigrated from England to British North America in 1819. Benefitting from letters of introduction to major figures in Lower Canada, Gibbs was soon employed as the master miller of the Seigneurie of

Terrebonne. In 1832 he left Lower Canada with his large family to establish a mill at Oshawa. One son, T.N. Gibbs, became a businessman and Conservative MP. A pioneer of the “political picnic”, his election victories were very costly but he could boast of defeating George Brown in 1867. Two of Thomas’ daughters married ministers. Mary married William Schenck Blackstock and Sarah married James Gooderham. William Blackstock is perhaps the most intriguing person in the book. After converting to Methodism at 18, he began a career as a circuit-rider. His satisfaction with pastoral work and fondness for people — and “a large dish of conversation” — was threatened at times by a profound weariness. The round of travel, visiting and other parish duties was onerous, and his difficulties were compounded by frequent changes in circuit. As well, his pay was continuously in arrears and the burden of debt to merchants left a heavy mark on him and his wife.

The well-developed portraits of individuals are strengthened by the links the author draws between family events and historical context. We learn about the divisions within the Gibbs family over the 1820 squabble between George IV and his consort, Queen Caroline, how the economic depression of 1857 affected a Methodist minister’s pay, the offence felt by Mary Blackstock when her husband did not receive appropriate recognition when presented to the Prince of Wales during his tour in 1860 and about a family member who seconded a motion condemning “that infamous upstart Riel”.

Moreover, the book details 19th-century childhood. Life in the Gibbs, Blackstock and Gooderham families was insecure. Children died of diphtheria, scarlet fever and tuberculosis. They died in accidents, by drowning and by scalding. A boy employed with the East India Company was lost at sea. Children shared with their parents the rupture of emigration and the economic hardships of pioneering in the backwoods. Even the children of prosperous families had to contend with fires which destroyed livelihoods and with the consequences of unpredictable prices. Caring families, the central institution for raising children, helped to offset the hardship. Precepts for raising children were mild, based on “kind and sound reasoning accompanied by a firm command without austere rebukes”. Strong family and community ties assisted people in difficult circumstances. Mary Blackstock often stayed with members of her extended family when her husband changed circuit. When she fell ill, her husband’s flock took in her younger children until her health was restored.

Formal education took many shapes before the advent of universal public schooling. Some children were taught at home. Common schools provided the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. Secondary (grammar) schools were expensive — if not on account of the fees, because of the cost of boarding in a distant community. They were open only to the wealthy and the urban. Tom Blackstock, a minister’s son, attended secondary school, and later Upper Canada College, by virtue of financial support from his wealthy Gibbs uncles. The Gibbs girls, in contrast, “were not allowed to go to school, had to remain at home under a governess, were cut off from their contemporaries, dressed in outmoded fashions and, circumscribed in every way, discouraged from entering university or thinking of professions; the proper place was home and family”. Another middle-class girl was reminded repeatedly that the only career open to her was that of a school teacher. Poorer girls might work as servants in the households of the more prosperous.

Although *All the Journey Through* chronicles a relatively prosperous extended

family, childhood was marked by premature death, limited schooling, little shelter from the adult world and an early start to adult responsibilities. Apart from schools, no specialized institutions existed for children. A 14-year-old boy enrolled in the militia in 1838 in the wake of the Upper Canadian Rebellion. At 14 years of age, T.N. Gibbs joined his father in running a milling business in Oshawa. William Blackstock's son, Tom, ran away from his straitened home at 15 to earn a living. The 19th-century childhood was short.

Scouting was the most popular of the special organizations designed for boys which began to emerge in the late 19th century. Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993) argues that scouting aimed to make men, and that the frontier provided the model of the real man: the virile, resourceful, toughened scout. As a means to arrest national decline by building a revitalized manhood, the Boy Scout movement responded to wide concern within the British Empire over perceived national degeneracy. The unease was fed by the decline of Great Britain relative to its economic rivals, Germany and the United States, and by fears of a looming European war. Within the working class, rural out-migration had produced the weak, stunted slum dweller. Within the middle class, masculinity was besieged by the New Woman and by the suffragettes. Many were coming to believe that the "enervating, feminine atmosphere of the home" in which boys were raised sapped manhood, producing not the hardy soldier, but the aesthete. A falling birth rate, particularly among the middle class, provided evidence of declining national virility.

MacDonald draws on the extensive secondary literature on the frontier and on scouting, as well as on Lord Baden-Powell's publications, Scouting Association official publications, archives in London, England and on contemporary newspapers. He examines the relationship between the American and the Imperial frontier myth and the Boy Scouts, documents the construction of the scout through fiction and journalism and explores the development of the belief that nature provides a cure for physical and moral deterioration. MacDonald considers Baden-Powell's self-construction in the context of frontier myth. Dubbed "the wolf that never sleeps" by the natives of southern Africa, or so Baden-Powell phrased it, and apparently undisturbed by fact that there are no wolves in Africa (they may have meant to call him a hyena, a label of scorn), Baden-Powell enjoyed prestige as a frontiersman before he won fame for his leadership in the defence of Mafeking during the Boer War.

Baden-Powell's original intention in writing the manual *Scouting for Boys* in 1908 was to revitalize existing boys' groups in Great Britain, which were usually church-based, such as the Presbyterian Boys' Brigade or the Anglican Church Lads. Its publication, though, triggered a rapid growth in scouting groups and Baden-Powell moved quickly to take charge of them. By 1910, there were 107,000 Scouts in the United Kingdom. The organization expanded overseas to Canada, Australia and New Zealand in 1908, and to India the following year. Boys welcomed the opportunity to camp, learn woodcraft and participate in story-telling and game-playing. Its rituals, such as the scout motto, the chant of the Scout Oath and the Scout Law, attracted followers as well. From its outset, the scouting movement was marked by mixed messages and an ambiguous role. The adventure and escapism offered by frontier play drew boys to scouting, yet scout organization also emphasized hard work and good

citizenship. Although scouting sought to teach notions of duty and obedience — the reconstructed child was malleable — it selected as its model frontier scouts, mavericks condemned for their lack of discipline. The scouting movement equivocated over the man it aimed to produce from the boy.

In *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994) Katherine Arnup examines the literature offering advice on the care of infant and pre-school-age children and explores the construction of motherhood in the 20th century. Her book is based primarily on published sources but also draws from archival research and from interviews with 12 mothers. Although Arnup's focus is on mothers and not children, the book reveals a good deal about childhood in the 20th century.

Concerted efforts to reduce infant and maternal mortality began at the turn of this century.<sup>28</sup> Voluntary organizations, including the National Council of Women, the Victorian Order of Nurses and Women's Institutes, founded milk depots and domestic science programmes. At the same time local and provincial governments moved beyond the rudimentary 19th-century public health infrastructure and introduced well-baby clinics and hired public health nurses. The federal Department of Health was established in 1919 and it created a Division of Child Welfare the following year. The efforts of these organizations focused on women as the primary caregivers. Characterized as abjectly ignorant and in dire need of expert advice, mothers required training. Both prenatal and "little mothers classes" were held in public schools and community centres. Radio broadcasts disseminated information for mothers and so too did films. The most significant means of education, though, was by means of published literature. The federal Division of Child Welfare published hundreds of thousands of copies of Helen MacMurchy's *The Canadian Mother's Book* and its successor, *The Canadian Mother and Child*, in English and French, as well as its even more widely distributed Little Blue Book series.<sup>29</sup>

Expert advice this century has shifted from the advocacy of careful control and management of infants and children, to the far more flexible and child-centred approach characteristic of the period since the Second World War. Whereas a first generation of medical "advisors", such as Alan Brown of Toronto or Alton Goldbloom of Montreal, recommended the close monitoring and rigid scheduling of children's activities — feeding, sleeping, toileting, bathing, etc. — a later generation exemplified by Dr. Benjamin Spock (Arnup fails to mention Spock's Canadian contemporary, S.R. Laycock) advised mothers to take their lead from the child. This more recent advice also placed greater emphasis on psychological health, a prominent theme in the emerging child-study movement in Canada.<sup>30</sup> The child's physical health was assumed; the task of mothers was to create a healthy emotional environment for the child.

Publication figures make it clear that advice literature was widely distributed, and other evidence indicates that it was read and shared. Arnup uses her interviews with

28 On this theme, see Cynthia R. Comacchio, "*Nations Are Built of Babies*": *Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston, 1993).

29 See also Dianne Dodd, "Advice to Parents: The Blue Books, Helen MacMurchy, MD, and the Federal Department of Health, 1920-34", *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/ Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine*, 8, 2 (1991), pp. 203-30.

30 Jocelyn Motyer Raymond, *The Nursery World of Dr. Blatz* (Toronto, 1991).

a small number of women to shed light on why women turned to advice literature and what its impact was. Rapid urbanization broke down traditional female support networks and declining birth-rates meant that women had less experience with the children of others. The professionalization of child care encouraged a sense of dependency among mothers and fostered new ideas regarding child-rearing. What was the impact of the advice for mothers? Although they could exercise discretion in heeding advice, according to Arnup they risked feelings of guilt if they resisted it. The expert literature was never reticent about blaming mothers for their alleged shortcomings. Yet there were limits to the extent to which many women could adhere to advice, as it failed to address poverty, inadequate housing, malnutrition or ethnic differences. Some advice, as Arnup amply illustrates, was simply not affordable, such as that concerning the use of medical services. Other advice was contradictory, as mothers who read widely could well appreciate. Infancy and early childhood were not constructed through advice literature, but a certain view of motherhood was. Although it was a limited view, and one particularly insensitive to economic circumstances, it illustrates the extent to which 20th-century motherhood has been, and remains, "contested terrain".

Both Paul A. Erickson, *Halifax's North End: An Anthropologist Looks at the City* (Hantsport, N.S., Lancelot Press, 1987) and Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995), focus on a single district within Halifax. Erickson's interest lies with the changing urban landscape: the development of the community, the architecture of noteworthy houses, the major roads, the large buildings of the military establishment, the factories of the industrializing city, the levelling of much of the North End by the Explosion, wartime booms and post-Second World War urban renewal projects. As such, it is a useful introduction to the physical contours of the community and its residents. The book closes with a number of brief personal accounts of the naval presence, of Africville, of the Halifax Explosion Memorial Bell Tower and of an excavation of a settler's house destroyed by fire in 1787. The majority of the inhabitants of the North End in the past were children. Their existence, though, is all but unrecognized by Erickson.

Morton's book is far more ambitious in scope. It focuses on one working-class district in north Halifax, Richmond Heights. Her narrow focus allows her to convey a strong sense of place as she examines issues of class, age and gender over the limited time span of a single decade, the 1920s. Morton draws on city directories, newspapers and a range of archival sources. Her most important sources, though, are the records of the Halifax Relief Commission, which in the dual role of landlord and relief administrator, had wide contact with the community. Even so, the history that her evidence permits is counterbalanced by silences. "Households generally placed much value upon privacy", Morton acknowledges, "and as a result much of domestic life remains invisible".

This book is the first in a series from the University of Toronto Press labelled "Studies in Gender and History". Gender, like class, can be merely a descriptive category. Morton explores how gender was experienced differently according to age and marital status. She does this in a series of chapters that, oddly, are arranged opposite to the life cycle, focusing on elderly men and women, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, single mothers and female household heads, men and young

women. Gender identity determined the sexual division of labour and appropriate sexual behaviour. Maintaining gender respectability placed differing pressures on men and women. At the base of manliness was the adult male's role as a skilled worker and supporter of the family. Yet the 1920s were marked by a loss of skilled jobs for men. At the same time, wage-earning possibilities for women increased in the growing service sector, and they gained access to some previously all-male occupations. Tension between men and women was heightened by girls' lengthier school attendance, which was required for white-collar employment such as retailing where comportment and speech had to be shaped to meet middle-class standards. For a woman, though, the key role remained that of wife. Women abandoned paid labour on marriage. The hallmark of a wife's success was her ability to "make do". This involved maintaining household cleanliness, ensuring the proper dress of family members and exercising due control over children. Consumerism redefined the respectable home over the decade, as products such as radios, gramophones and washing machines became household items. Rising consumption standards placed additional pressure on men's income.

The ways in which gender shaped identity, or in which it was experienced, are side issues to the main issue addressed in *Ideal Surroundings*: gender identity as an agent of change. Morton seeks to show that there are "connections between the way men and women perceived masculinity and femininity and the decline of a distinct, local working-class culture in the third decade of this century". Working-class culture was marked by a male-dominated social environment based on church associations, youth groups, ethnic organizations, trade unions and sporting clubs. Even recreational hunting, fishing and gardening tended to exclude women. In contrast, domestic life in "private, compartmentalized, self-contained dwellings", was women's realm. The introduction, or growing use, of indoor water, electricity, sewers and consumer durables such as iceboxes and washing machines further isolated women from community life by reducing their need to leave the house. This reinforced the existing gender-based schism within working-class culture. While Morton underlines age as a significant historical variable, she fails to explore it sufficiently, alleging that "children were not active participants in the creation of gender ideology". Her denigration of children's agency is at odds with evidence she produces in the book, such as her depiction of boys' juvenile pranks. She also misses the opportunity to address, in the context of her focus on class formation, the manner in which efforts to construct a common experience of childhood eroded class identity — perhaps more so than the gender issues she examines in such detail.

Neil Sutherland's recent study *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the First World War to the Age of Television* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997) picks up where his earlier book left off, examining 20th-century childhood before the advent of "the age of television" in the 1960s. *Growing Up* focuses on three localities, two neighbourhoods in Vancouver — one working-class (Cedar Cottage) and one middle-class (Kerrisdale) — and a rural district in north-central British Columbia — the community of Evelyn in the Bulkley Valley. Sutherland's evidence is gleaned primarily from interviews with hundreds of people born between 1910 and 1950. Sutherland employs the concept of "the central scripts of childhood" — the recurrent, routine events common to childhoods which accumulate to form the structure of children's lives — as a way to cope with idiosyncratic memories and deal



with the limitations of his subjects' recollections. The book develops scripts drawn from a number of contexts — family, school, work and the community. Sutherland supplements oral history with memoirs, biographies, novels, newspaper articles and a series of social work theses. There are few references to primary archival sources.

*Growing Up* is written almost entirely from the perspective of children. Sutherland's subjects tended to take the circumstances of their lives as given and had little knowledge of the wider world, despite living through major events such as the Depression and the Second World War. They took the class, gender, ethnic and religious identities they acquired within their family as givens. Many of the most memorable events of 20th-century childhoods occurred at school. Teachers, the curriculum and school discipline all were central to childhood lore. Those Sutherland interviewed recalled the routines of waiting for the bell, the line-up outside, the coveted first place in line, the roll call inside and the turn to exercise books. And there was the presence of the teacher at the blackboard, enjoining children to "sit up straight and face the front". They also remembered the range of punishments children endured — copying lines of text, serving detentions and receiving the strap from the principal. Schools reinforced gender identity through separate doors, play areas and clothing codes, and through different discipline for girls and boys. School books, called "readers", also portrayed distinct roles for girls and boys.

Canada may have been a more prosperous country in the 20th century than it had been in the 19th, but the vast majority of children lived in households where frugality was a necessity. Children had few changes of clothing (always bought for durability) and could expect to share a room, often even a bed, with siblings. While work still played a role in all children's lives, it was at the margins and secondary to the demands of schooling. Children continued to want to help, and many parents saw work as a virtue. Work, both paid and unpaid, was gendered. Mothers were reluctant to assign to sons domestic tasks such as minding younger children, buying, storing and preparing food, caring for the sick and elderly, or cleaning clothing, the house and its furnishings. Boys, though, were asked to stack and fetch wood or bring in coal and thus were beneficiaries of the post-Second World War shift to oil, gas and electricity. Rising standards of living over the century reduced the needs of families for children's wage earnings. Older children found part-time jobs minding children, delivering newspapers or groceries or working in retailing, but to an increasing extent even working-class children kept all their earnings. Full-time work, entailing a premature departure from school, was uncommon. On the farm, children worked more than their urban counterparts, facing the daily and seasonal rounds of chores. Particularly in the early years, children's labour was critical to pioneer farming. Boys' work occurred outside the house and that of girls within. Children's chores met in the farmyard, where the weeding of the vegetable garden was widely considered the most unpleasant task. The state's requirements for schooling were not necessarily respected at seeding and harvest times. In rural areas, because high school attendance required boarding in town, many children did not advance beyond the primary grades.

Sutherland takes particular interest in the culture of childhood. Within the limits parents sought to impose, the peer group — organized on gender, age or ethnic lines — defined children's dress, views and behaviour. Status was measured by criteria such as physical size, temperament, courage, intelligence, possessions and fidelity to childhood rules of conduct. Among peers, the relationship of best friend held a special

place. Childhood was also marked by its superstitions: “walk on a crack break your mother’s back”. Movies took a central place in children’s leisure activity, and the Saturday matinee was the topic of discussion the following week.

This book, which aims to be comprehensive, necessarily contains gaps. There is little mention of efforts during the 20th century to further the reconstruction of childhood by means of income support programmes for families and universal health care measures, although the book provides evidence of higher levels of spending money in households. There is no discussion of children in voluntary organizations such as Boy Scouts or Canadian Girls in Training. Its neglect of French-Canadian childhoods is unfortunate. Inclusion of a Québec community in the study would have provided a useful counterpoint to the English-Canadian childhoods described here. More regrettably, Sutherland devotes little attention to exploring children’s agency, affirming instead that “an unchanging characteristic of being a child is a sense of powerlessness”.

And Sutherland’s conclusions about 20th-century childhood? The emotional dimensions of childhood are, he observes, virtually unchanged. Children’s health, though, has improved considerably. Smaller families and higher standards of living have meant more material and emotional resources per child, although wealth is unevenly shared in a class society. There is evidence for a reduction in corporal punishment over this century. This may reflect changing expert advice, but Sutherland gives far greater credit to lower levels of pressure in the household: fathers have more attractive jobs and mothers have more money to spend. The family remains the paramount institution for raising children and the primary influence in children’s lives; it is “the foundation of most happy and unhappy childhoods”.

*Growing Up* enjoys the enviable status of being the benchmark against which other historians of childhood will measure their work. More importantly, it is a benchmark for measuring the extent to which childhood has been reconstructed. Sutherland’s closing message, which underlines Canada’s commitment to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the hopes expressed at the 1990 World Summit for Children, is a forceful reminder that many of the 19th-century goals remain to be attained, not just for Canadian children, but for all the world’s children.

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